



# MONTREAL

## Learning from different partnerships

This was Active Neighbourhoods Canada's first site. From the start, the Montréal Urban Ecology Centre (MUEC) wanted one of the communities to be located in a densely populated part of Montréal, Québec. Discussions and meetings led the MUEC to identify the Beaubien community in the borough of Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie as a potential project site. The political climate was favourable, and the district was already discussing the revitalization of the area around the Beaubien metro station.

## A PROJECT AND ITS OPPORTUNITIES

The MUEC now had an opportunity to work directly with decision makers on participatory planning. The setting was also very interesting. It is a very busy neighbourhood hub with several vulnerable populations located in close proximity: primary school pupils, seniors living in public housing and metro users, among others.

The MUEC and the borough also saw an opportunity for professionals to learn new practices and enhance their tool-set in urban design and active transportation, as well as helping different departments (engineering, planning, social services, etc.) learn to work together. There was also potential for changing practices in favour of more participatory and intersectoral approaches involving local community organizations, the borough's departments and institutional participants with a stake in the project (public transit, public health, etc.).

However, the project also had a number of technical constraints, leaving limited room for citizen input. Despite that drawback, the decision was made to go ahead with the partnership.

Several activities were undertaken to collect information for the neighbourhood profile and introduce tools used in participatory urban planning to borough professionals and local stakeholders. A local committee was formed and met several times. Field studies led to interesting observations about the design and use of public spaces in the targeted area, and gave the municipality's professionals some new tools. Because citizen participation is an integral part of the participatory planning process, several citizen-oriented activities were organized. Their success showed that the neighbourhood's residents are invested in the future of the spaces they use.

## SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES

Participatory urban planning projects are executed in collaboration with multiple community-based partners. Good communication and a shared understanding of the project are therefore essential to each project's success.

*The Active Neighbourhoods Canada communities distinguish themselves by the links they create between the variety of actors. Elected officials, community representatives, citizens are called upon to work together and develop a common vision.*

In the Beaubien project we learned how important these two success factors really are and the pitfalls that arise when they are not present. As our first Active Neighbourhoods Canada pilot project it taught us these important lessons:

- **Facilitating information flow.** Several meetings were held involving either the political or administrative apparatus, but not both simultaneously. The borough mayor was very enthusiastic about the idea, and professionals were keen on learning new practices, but internal personnel changes and communication challenges made it difficult to share and understand information concerning the project throughout the hierarchy.
- **Identifying the right key actors.** Several partners identified by the MUEC did not have the resources to participate fully in a project of this scope, or the topic was not close to their mission. It is always important to be sure to have the means to match our ambitions. A project developed solely with a municipality is vulnerable to changes in direction. By working in concert with civil society, if expected changes do not materialize the community remains



equipped to demand a more pleasant neighbourhood for its residents. This might require finding additional funds to enable the participation of local groups, as was done in subsequent projects.

- **Defining a shared vision.** Active Neighbourhoods Canada is noteworthy for the links it has been able to forge among different participants in each community. Elected officials, community representatives and citizens are brought together and develop a shared vision. For contextual reasons, it was difficult to ensure that these actors had a common vision for the role of participation in the project, which surely played an important role in the Beaubien project's outcomes.

Because the borough's strategic directions had evolved, the Beaubien project ended earlier than expected. The neighbourhood is seeing new infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists, demonstrating that the municipality is enthusiastic about active transportation. With the Beaubien neighbourhood profile in hand, local stakeholders can use the information from the field, from citizens and the existing literature to make progress at another time. The professionals appreciated the participatory urban planning approach and later used it effectively in other projects in the borough, with the understanding that the process needs to start before proposals are drafted, giving citizens true power to influence the outcome.



**VIEW THE PORTRAIT HERE:**

Portrait de quartier: métro Beaubien  
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